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# Opportunities and Barriers to Implementing Tobacco 21 in Vermont

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## Introduction

- Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.<sup>1</sup>
- Approximately 90% of current smokers starting smoking before age 18<sup>2</sup>
- Earlier age of tobacco use initiation associated with lower rates of smoking cessation<sup>3</sup>
- The proposed Tobacco 21 bill (T21) would raise the minimum legal age of sales to 21, creating the opportunity to reduce tobacco use initiation
- Within five years of implementing the nation's first T21 bill in 2005, the 30-day smoking rate in Needham, MA dropped from 13% to 7%<sup>4</sup>
- Recently in Vermont, the age of gun sales was raised to 21, the age of marijuana possession was set to 21, and the Burlington City Council resolved to recommend the age of tobacco products sales be raised to 21

## Objectives

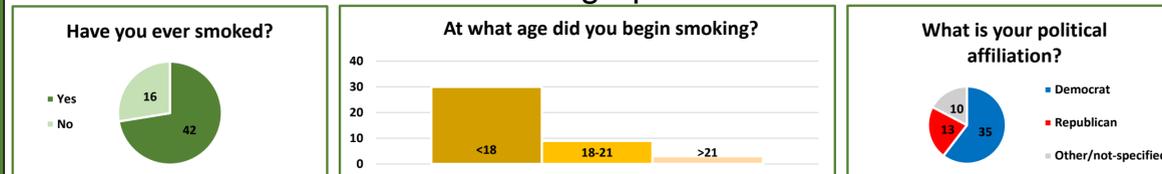
- Understand why T21 has been unable to pass in Vermont to date
- Understand the current view of T21 held by Vermont legislators
- Identify opportunities and barriers to implementing T21 in Vermont

## Methods

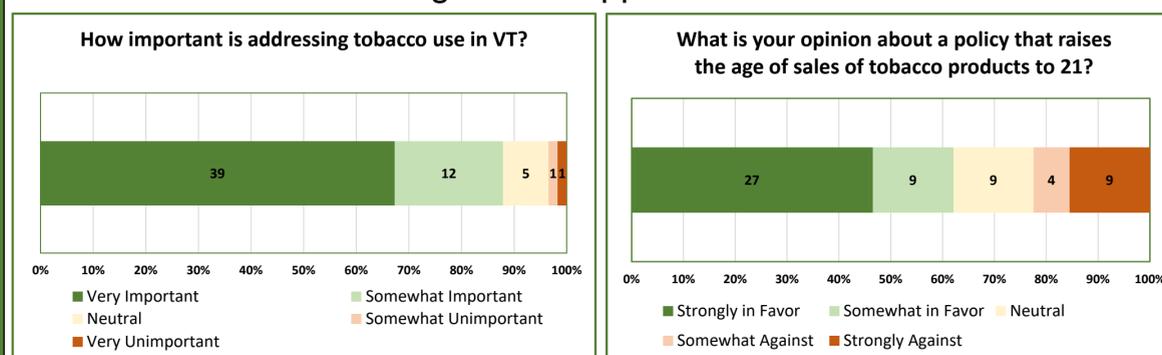
- Developed 28-item LimeSurvey with qualitative and open-ended questions regarding demographics, personal smoking history, and attitudes towards T21
- Administered survey to available Vermont legislators via email listserv (n=174)
- Identified interview candidates assisted by the American Lung Association
- Recorded, transcribed, and analyzed interviews for themes and quotes (n=6)
- Analyzed quantitative results using LimeSurvey (n=58, response rate=33%, male=31, female=27, age 18-29=0, age 30-39=1, age 40-49=6, age 50-59=6, age 60-69=23, age 70-79=22, age 80+=0)
- Assessed open-ended responses for common themes

## Results

### Demographics



### Legislator Support for T21



### Common Themes in Interviews and Survey Open-Ended Questions

#### Barriers to T21:

- Questions individual agency and personal responsibility
- 18 is age of majority for voting and military service
- Concerns about cross-border sales
- There could be an enforcement issue
- It could bring a revenue loss to local vendors and the state
- Strong influence of Big Tobacco on Vermont legislators

#### Opportunities for T21:

- Smoking is a public health issue
- Young people care about T21
- Long-term healthcare savings
- New legislation age of 21 for guns and marijuana
- Can prevent new addictions in high school students
- Can make more informed decisions at age 21

## Discussion

- No one is denying that smoking is a public health concern in Vermont
- There are a finite number of prevailing arguments against passing a T21 bill in Vermont
- Legislators identify a small number of common themes on both sides of the argument
- At its root, the question is one of individual rights versus public health

## Conclusion

- The identified common themes are potential approaches to advocate for T21 in Vermont
- The question of revenue loss for local vendors and the state needs to be fleshed out
- Legislators' opinions are a mix of perceived facts about smoking and a T21 bill, with only some being supported by existing data

## Recommendations

- Share these data with Vermont legislators
- Share these data with other advocates of T21 such as the American Cancer Society and the American Heart Association
- Generate a more comprehensive fiscal analysis that includes healthcare cost savings related to tobacco use

## References

- <sup>1</sup>Macinko J, Silver D. Impact of New York City's 2014 Increased Minimum Legal Purchase Age on Youth Tobacco Use. *AJPH*. 2018; 108(5):669-675.
- <sup>2</sup>Winickoff JP, McMillen R, Tanski S, Wilson K, Gottlieb M, Crane R. Public support for raising the age of sale for tobacco to 21 in the United States. *BMJ*. 2016;252:284-288.
- <sup>3</sup>Farber JK, Pakhale S, Neptune ER. Tobacco 21: An Important Public Policy to Protect Our Youth. *Public Health and Policy*. 2016; 13(12):2115-2118.
- <sup>4</sup>Institute of Medicine of the National Academies. Public Health Implications of Raising the Minimum Age of Legal Access to Tobacco Products 2015. [http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/TobaccoMinAge/tobacco\\_minimum\\_age\\_report\\_brief.pdf](http://www.nationalacademies.org/hmd/~/media/Files/Report%20Files/2015/TobaccoMinAge/tobacco_minimum_age_report_brief.pdf)

## In Their Own Words

"What is so special about being 21? Why is 18 considered old enough for many other life choices?"

"Our state constitution grants full rights of citizenship to those 18 and older. As long as that provision remains in place, I believe it is my legal, ethical, and moral duty to protect the constitutional rights of citizens in that age group."

"Honestly, so few people smoke now that, it is out of favor."

"...the tobacco 21 advocacy raises kind of a fundamental question that medical students and doctors are always having to contend with, as are policy makers, which is the tension between a prohibition of something versus education."

"There is no equation between fighting for your country and voting and polluting your own personal health."

"One I hear all the time is 'if you are old enough to go to war, you are old enough to smoke.' Which is ridiculous, it assumes 18 is old enough to go to war. . ."

"A local grocer told one of the legislators that this bill would put him out of business."

"If we passed the bill, we would get better health for Vermonters, less people dying prematurely, a better work force, and overall better economics."

"...if this is the way [store owners] are making their money, it is the wrong way to make money."